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Agenda item 7

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON ITS NINTH SESSION HELD AT GENEVA

Draft report

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VI. PROCEDURAL, INSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL MATTERS

B. Designation of a permanent secretariat and arrangements for its functioning

1. Proceedings

1. The Committee considered this item at its 3rd and 4th plenary meetings on 15 and 16 February, on the basis of a note by the interim secretariat (A/AC.237/53) which was introduced by the Executive Secretary at the 3rd plenary meeting. At the same meeting, the representative of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) reiterated the offer of the Secretary-General of that Organization to provide accommodation to the permanent secretariat of the Convention, on terms and conditions to be negotiated, in the new WMO building projected for completion in 1997.

2. Statements were made on this item by representatives of 19 States, including one on behalf of the European Economic Community and its member States. These statements underlined different criteria put forward in the interim secretariat's note and expressed preferences with respect to the institutional options discussed therein, notably as regards the location of the permanent secretariat within the institutional framework of an existing organization. There was general support for a cost-effective arrangement for the permanent secretariat, one which encouraged collaboration with other related secretariats and consequent economies in operating costs, possibly including co-location with some such secretariats. The possibility of placing different conventions related to sustainable development, together with their secretariats, under a single institutional umbrella, was regarded as an issue to be explored over the long term. Several representatives commented on financial aspects of the arrangements for the permanent secretariat, stressing among other factors the need for a sound financial base for its operation. Many representatives highlighted the need for the independence of the permanent secretariat and for appropriate administrative autonomy and flexibility, while recognizing that these aims could be achieved through a negotiated arrangement with a host organization.

3. A number of representatives commented on the need to assess the advantages of different physical locations for the permanent secretariat, including the different United Nations centres. The delegation of Uruguay formally conveyed the offer of his country to host the permanent secretariat. The representative of Switzerland referred to the contribution being made by her country to the accommodation of the interim secretariat, together with a number of other convention secretariats, and to a plan to co-locate such secretariats in a new facility at some time in the future.

4. The Executive Secretary replied to questions posed during the discussion on this item and clarified certain issues raised therein.

2. Conclusions

5. The Committee took note with appreciation of the analysis of institutional options for the permanent secretariat and of financial and staffing matters, contained in document A/AC.237/53.

6. It endorsed the conclusion that the interim secretariat would need to continue to function after the first session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 1) during a transitional period ending on 31 December 1995 and that the permanent secretariat should thus start operations with effect from 1 January 1996. The Committee recommended that the permanent secretariat be built on the foundations of the interim secretariat, in the interest of continuity.

7. Having reviewed the institutional options outlined in the document (Section IV), the Committee decided to examine all these options further at its tenth session.

8. It requested the interim secretariat to provide additional information to the Committee at its tenth session to support this examination, with particular reference to the possibility of negotiating an arrangement to place the permanent secretariat, at least initially, within a host organization. In this context, the secretariat should explore possible arrangements with the United Nations Secretariat, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), including relevant financial, administrative and staffing provisions. It should also ascertain the content of the offer of accommodation from WMO. The secretariat should provide summary information on relevant precedents with respect to other conventions, whether operating independently or within the framework of a host organization. To the extent possible, the secretariat's report should provide indications of the relative costs and benefits of different options.

9. The Committee took note of the interest of Uruguay in hosting the permanent secretariat and of the facilities provided by Switzerland to the interim secretariat. The Committee decided to consider the physical location of the permanent secretariat in the light of its further review of possible institutional arrangements.

VIII. REVIEW OF ACTIVITIES OF THE INTERIM SECRETARIAT, INCLUDING REVIEW OF EXTRABUDGETARY FUNDS

1. Proceedings

10. At the 3rd plenary meeting, on 15 February, the Executive Secretary introduced a note containing information on current activities of the interim secretariat, administrative and budgetary matters, including staffing, and the need for contributions to the two extrabudgetary funds established by General Assembly resolution 45/212, namely the special voluntary fund for the participation of developing countries in the sessions of the Committee (para. 10), and the trust fund for the negotiating process (para. 20). In doing so, he updated information provided in that note, in particular with respect to contributions to both funds.

11. While thanking contributors to these funds, he reiterated his regret that the insufficiency of funding for participation had made it necessary to reduce the number of countries funded at the present session. He noted that financial support had been offered to one delegate each from 81 countries and that 67 countries had taken advantage of this offer. He expressed the hope that adequate and timely contributions would be available to finance participation in the tenth session of the Committee.

12. With respect to the operating costs of the interim secretariat, the Executive Secretary drew attention to the detailed information provided in a table annexed to the note (Annex 1) and to the fact that additional contributions to the trust fund for the negotiating process were needed to maintain the current level of activity of the interim secretariat beyond 30 June 1994.

13. Statements were made by the representatives of 16 States. Those from developed countries provided information on their current and future contributions to one or both extrabudgetary funds, recognizing the need for timely contributions, as well as on their plans to provide bilateral support for staff positions in the interim secretariat. Some of these representatives were able to indicate significantly increased levels of contributions, taking account both of the need to maintain the widest possible participation in the Committee and of the growing demand by the Committee for services from the interim secretariat. One representative provided information concerning bilateral assistance to Pacific island developing countries, inter alia for participation in the work of the Committee. The representative of a developing country expressed the hope that it would be possible to fund two delegates per country in the future, given the need for delegations to cover two simultaneous meetings. Another representative of a developing country emphasized the importance of maintaining geographical balance in the provision of staff to the interim secretariat. On this latter point, which the Executive Secretary endorsed, the representative of a developed country indicated that it might be possible for his country to provide bilateral support for a staff position that could be filled by a national of a developing country.

2. Conclusions

14. The Committee took note of the information provided by the interim secretariat on its activities and on the state of the extrabudgetary funds. It expressed appreciation for the efforts of contributors to the two extrabudgetary funds, for the work of the interim secretariat and for the transparency of its report.

15. The Committee expressed concern that it had not been possible for the interim secretariat to maintain the usual level of funding for the participation of developing and other countries in the ninth session of the Committee. It hoped that adequate contributions to the special voluntary fund, well in advance of the tenth session, would allow the restoration of the usual funding arrangements. It noted the evolution of the secretariat's practice in managing these arrangements, including its priorities for the allocation of financial support for participation, which took account of the particular needs of countries that provide Officers to the Committee and its Working Groups (A/AC.237/54, paras. 39 - 41).

16. The Committee recognized that the tasks that it had assigned to the interim secretariat were stretching the secretariat's capacities and resources. It welcomed the important financial contributions announced during the session, which reflected growing awareness of the need for technical and analytical inputs by the interim secretariat to the process of communication and review of information under the Convention, as well as the needs of the Climex project.